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April is STD Awareness Month

The Department of Public Health and Social Services (DPHSS) commemorates April as STD Awareness Month. The theme for STD Awareness Month is *Talk. Test. Treat.*

Three common STDs have increased sharply across the United States for the fourth year in a row. To help reverse this trend, the Department of Public Health and Social Services is calling on individuals and healthcare providers to take these three actions to protect themselves, their partners, and their patients from STDs: *Talk, Test, and Treat.*

In 2017 alone, Guam had 1107 cases of chlamydia (which also ranked Guam as having the 5th highest chlamydia rate in the nation), 202 cases of gonorrhea, and 21 cases of syphilis. More than two million cases of the three STDs combined were reported nationwide. Congenital syphilis—syphilis passed from a mother to her baby during pregnancy or delivery—has also dramatically increased nationwide.

Chlamydia, gonorrhea, and syphilis are curable with the right medicines, yet most cases go undiagnosed and untreated – which can lead to severe health problems that include infertility (inability to become pregnant), ectopic pregnancy (pregnancy outside the womb), stillbirth in infants, and increased HIV risk.

Anyone who has sex can get an STD, but some groups are more affected than others, especially young people aged 15-24. Prior studies suggest a range of factors may be at play – from socioeconomic challenges, like poverty, to issues of stigma and discrimination.

“Stigma and fear prevent individuals from getting tested and treated. Everyone should talk about sexual health, STDs, and testing not just during STD Awareness Month but all year long,” says Vince Aguon, MPA, and Acting Supervisor of DPHSS STD/HIV/Viral Hepatitis Program. “It’s a conversation that needs to happen among all of us... so we can collectively address the rising STD rates.”

All STDs can be prevented and treated, and most can be cured. Here’s how individuals and healthcare providers can add the *Talk.Test.Treat* strategy into their health routine:

Individuals can:

- Talk openly with partner(s) and healthcare providers about sex and STDs.

- Get tested. Because many STDs have no symptoms, getting tested is the only way to know for sure if you have an infection.
- If you test positive for an STD,
 - Work with your doctor to get the correct treatment. Some STDs can be cured with the right medication. Those that aren't curable can be treated.
 - Get tested for HIV; people who have an STD may be at increased risk of HIV.

Healthcare providers can:

- Providing the best care possible means talking with patients about sexual health and safe sex practices.
- Test patients as recommended by CDC.
- Follow CDC's STD Treatment Guidelines to make sure patients get successful treatment and care. CDC offers a free app for Apple and Android devices, so that you can access the guidelines from wherever you are.

April is STD Awareness Month, a time to raise awareness about what STDs are, but it's also a time to take action to protect your own health, or the health of those around you – whether they be a partner, a loved one, or a patient. Contact the DPHSS STD/HIV/Viral Hepatitis Program at (671) 734-2437 or email dulce.mendoza@dphss.guam.gov for more information on how you can talk, test, and treat. Follow the Prutehi Hao Facebook page at www.facebook.com/prutehihao to learn more about the testing events planned throughout April.


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